

PUBLIC LIBRARIES 101

FOR THE PEOPLE: A LEFTIST LIBRARY PROJECT

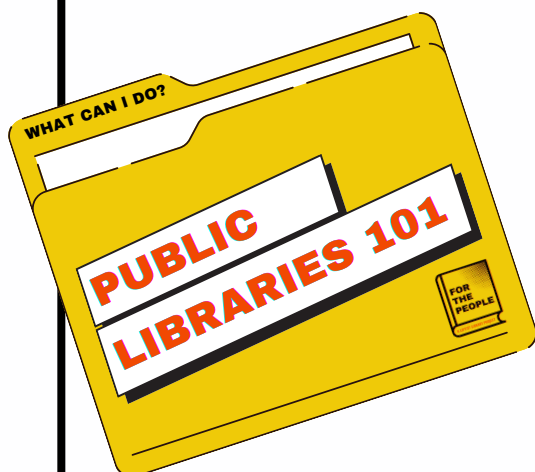


MOST OF US LOVE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

Of course we do: libraries are great. But in the face of slashed budgets, right wing attacks, privatization, book bans, and censorship...

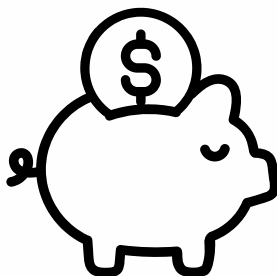
LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH.

To strengthen and expand public libraries, we need to build **local power** - and the first step is **understanding how our local library systems work...**



...how they're funded, who makes decisions, and what we can do about it.

You can take action right now to help your local public library.
Here's how.



WHO **PAYS** FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES?

YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY DOES.

The vast majority (87%) of all funding for public libraries comes from local revenues, with between 6-7% each coming from state funding as well as fines, fees, and donations.

Less than 1% of all funding for public libraries comes from the federal government.

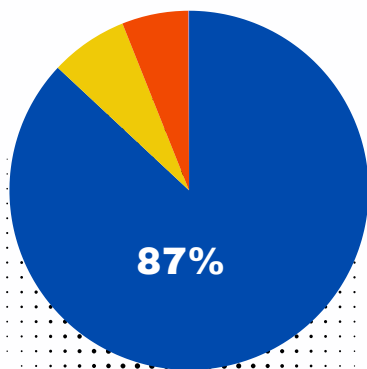
LOCAL SOURCES can vary but generally include one or more of the following:

- Dedicated property taxes
- General fund appropriations
- Local capital bonds
- Dedicated sales tax

Understanding how money flows through your library is **CRITICAL**.

Library budgets are public records, often posted online: track yours down and follow the money!

■ Local Funds ■ State Funds
■ Donations, Fines, and Fees ■ Federal





Public libraries
are one of our
few remaining
common goods.

Many of us have a catalog of positive memories from public libraries. As a result, it's easy to romanticize libraries and library work.

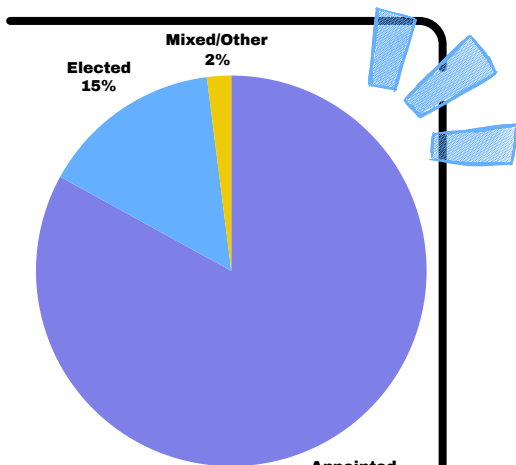
But public libraries - in addition to being essential third spaces, critical common goods, and vital parts of our communities - are also

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

Most public libraries - like most school systems - are governed by an elected or appointed set of public officials:

A LIBRARY BOARD.

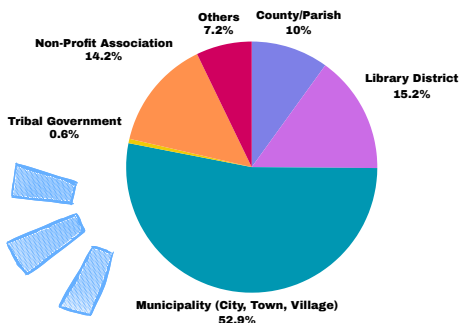




How do library boards work?

In 2023-2024, For The People: A Leftist Library Project undertook a massive data survey of all 9,000+ public library systems in the United States, and collected - with the help of hundreds of volunteers - information on the governance of more than 7,000 systems, information not available anywhere else.

FTP's research showed that the majority of library board seats in the US - 83% - are appointed positions. Those appointments are usually made by other local elected officials (city councils, county boards of supervisors, etc). The remaining 15% of seats are directly elected by voters.



What are the most common types of library systems?

It's critical to know how your library system fits in to your local government. **Slightly more than half of library systems nationwide are part of a municipal local government, in a town, village, or city.** In those situations, a library board often has a more advisory role to a city council or other similar body, who ultimately control budget and policy.



WHAT'S THE DEAL?

What are the differences between appointed and elected library boards?



Elected library boards are selected by voters, in local elections. **Often (but not always), elected library boards tend to have more latitude - to set their own budgets, to oversee spending, to set policy, to hire and fire the director.** Elected library boards tend to be most common in independent special districts and other non-municipal settings.



Appointed library boards can be constituted in a variety of ways - sometimes appointments are made by the city council, or by a mayor, or by county commissioners. Some appointed boards are totally self-contained, with existing library board members appointing new ones. **Often (but not always), appointed library boards tend to be more advisory in nature, often serving as sounding boards or resources for a library director, working as an advisory body for a controlling municipal entity (like a city council), or giving recommendations.** Appointed library boards make up the majority of governing structures nationwide.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Whether your local board is elected or appointed, it's a crucial site of local governing power, and a key political entity. Understanding how your board works and how new members join is essential.

RUNNING FOR A SEAT ON (OR SEEKING AN APPOINTMENT TO) YOUR LIBRARY BOARD IS VITAL. SYSTEMS WILL VARY, BUT GENERALLY LIBRARY BOARDS CAN:



SET AND APPROVE PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICIES

This includes critical policies like collection development and book challenge policies (which can defend against book ban and censorship attempts); employee policies about working conditions; patron policies that determine how community members are treated; and safety and data policies.



OVERSEE THE LIBRARY BUDGET & FUNDING

Most libraries need more money, and library boards can both set fiscal priorities and - in some circumstances - expand funding for libraries via bond measures, additional taxes, or fundraising partnerships.



SET STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE LIBRARY SYSTEM

What is the library system doing? Where is it headed? The Library Board sets the direction and can work to ensure that community priorities are reflected at every level.



HIRE, FIRE, AND/OR EVALUATE THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR

The Library Director oversees the library system's staff, and the Board oversees, supports, and evaluates the Director.

READY TO GET INVOLVED?

JOIN FTP'S CANDIDATE COHORT!

As part of the effort to build local governing power, For The People offers an online training program for folks who are planning to run for or seek appointment to their local library boards. It's also open to serving trustees who would like more training, support, and resources around how to govern effectively.

This twelve-week training program is open to any leftist person who's interested in building local power for public libraries; it is offered at no cost to participants (although you must agree to the expectations of the training to participate).

TO APPLY, HEAD TO:

librariesforthepeople.org/cohort



YOU
DON'T
HAVE
TO
DO
IT
ALONE!
JOIN
OTHERS
AND
LEARN
TOGETHER!

JOINING A LIBRARY BOARD IS IMPORTANT, BUT SO ARE THESE OTHER ACTIONS:

01

SHOW UP TO YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY BOARD MEETINGS!

Just show up and listen - what's on the agenda? What is the Board up to? Who are the Board members? What are they talking about - and what are they *not* talking about? Use the Library System Profile in this zine to help organize what you learn.

Once you know a little more, consider making a public comment, advocating for more funding, or encouraging your board to adopt an anti-censorship resolution.

For more info and additional guidance, including Board Watcher Bingo, check out our website, at www.librariesforthepeople.org/resources.



✓ FIND OUT WHEN YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL OR LIBRARY BOARD MEETS



USE OUR BOARD WATCH BINGO CARD WHILE ATTENDING MEETINGS:
[HTTP://BIT.LY/BOARDBINGO](http://bit.ly/boardbingo)



✓ WHO FUNDS YOUR LIBRARY? ADVOCATE TO INCREASE AND EXPAND FUNDING. OPPOSE ALL CUTS!

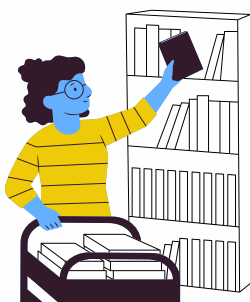
YOU CAN TAKE ACTION!

JOIN YOUR LOCAL FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUP

02

Most public libraries have a support group of volunteers, usually called the Friends of the Library (or something similar).

Look into your local Friends group, and find out how to join - you'll be able to lend your specific set of skills to an organization that needs your help. Not sure that the membership of your local Friends group reflects people like you? Join with a friend (or two, or three), and keep recruiting folks to get involved.



03

SET UP A LEMONADE STAND AND TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBORS ABOUT LIBRARIES.

Share what you've found out with your neighbors - and ask them what their experience of your local library system has been. What do they like? What's a challenge? Get a copy of For The People's Libraries and Lemonade awesome toolkit at librariesforthepeople.org/lemonade for an A to Z guide so easy, even kids can do it (and have!).



LIBRARY SYSTEM PROFILE

BASICS

- Library System Name: _____
- Library Website: _____
- System Type:
 - City/Municipal
 - County
 - Library District
 - Other
- Number of Locations/Branches: _____
- Annual Operating Budget: _____
- Name of Current Library Director: _____

LIBRARY BOARD

- Number of Seats on Board: _____
- What the current Board Members' terms?

- When and where does the Board meet? _____

- How is the board constituted (election or appointment)?
 - IF ELECTED:
 - Who votes?
 - When are elections held?
 - When is the next upcoming election?
 - When was the most recent election? What happened?
 - Are elections held at large or by districts?
 - What are the residency requirements (if any)?
 - When are the filing deadlines for elections? Where and with what entity do you file?
 - IF APPOINTED:
 - Who decides on appointments?
 - What is the process for getting appointed?
 - How often are appointments made?
 - When was the most recent appointment?
 - What is the next upcoming appointment?
 - What materials are required to seek an appointment?

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



TEN WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC LIBRARY



01

GET (AND USE!) YOUR LIBRARY CARD

Actively using your library card to borrow books, ebooks, graphic novels, media, and other resources is critical to helping libraries maintain and expand their annual public funding sources.



02

VOTE IN YOUR LOCAL ELECTIONS

Find out what elected body oversees your library - is it a city council, a library board, or some other group? Support, vote for, and advocate for elected officials who will support public libraries.



03

SPEAK UP AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

Once you know who the decision makers are, attend public meetings and make public comments on the record. Not sure what your library needs? Get to know your director and staff, and ask them.



04

REQUEST MATERIALS YOU WANT TO SEE

Most libraries accept - and indeed welcome! - patron requests for books or other media, and will buy those materials for the community. If you want to see a more diverse collection, submit a request!



05

JOIN A LIBRARY SUPPORT GROUP

Most libraries have a Friends of the Library group or a foundation that helps support the library. Join other library lovers to help volunteer, fundraise, and get the word out to your neighbors!



06

SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT LIBRARIES

Libraries work tirelessly to get the word out about programs and services - and you can help! Tell your friends and neighbors about what's happening at your local library and all it has to offer.



07

SHOW UP TO PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMS

Actively attend programs that your library is putting on, and bring a friend (or five). Branch out and try new options - many libraries depend on meeting attendance goals to maintain diverse programming.



08

FIGHT CENSORSHIP AND BOOK BANS

Speak up locally for the freedom to access and read diverse materials - fight back against book bans and censorship. For more, visit UniteAgainstBookBans.org to learn about ongoing efforts you can join.



09

DONATE TO SUPPORT GROUPS OR EFFORTS

Public funding rarely meets all the needs of a library - if you are able to give money, donate to support programs and services that matter to you.



10

RUN FOR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICE

Become a decision maker! Run for your local library board, town council, or city government to pass policies and budgets that support and protect libraries.

Discover more actions + resources at:
LIBRARIESFORTHEPEOPLE.ORG